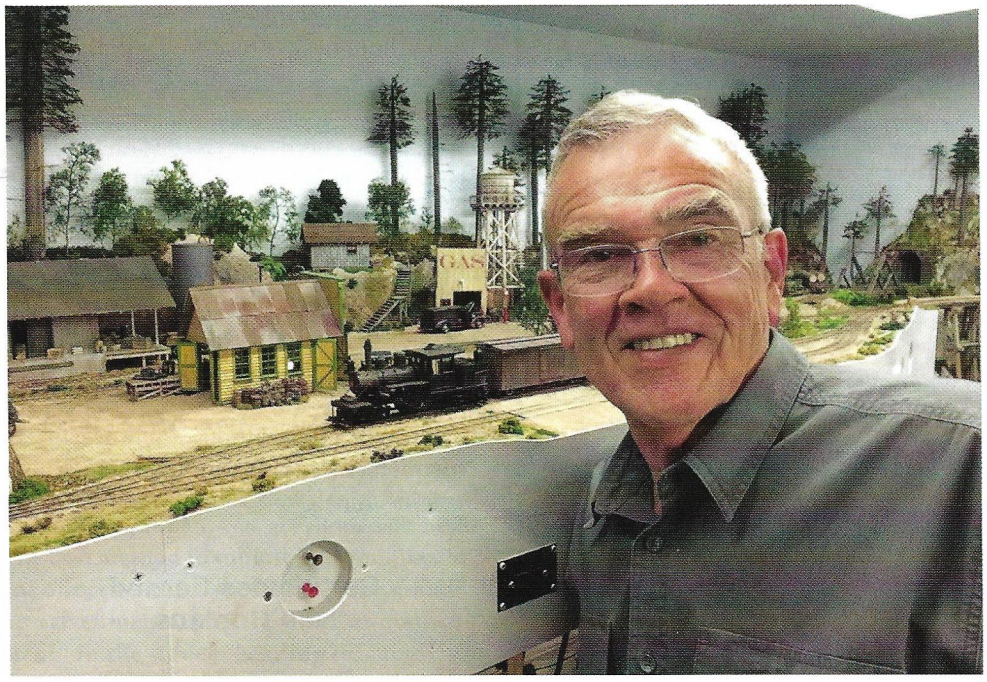

RON HOPKINS EARNS MMR #592

During my grade school years, I lived in a small Iowa town on the Chicago & North Western mainline. I enjoyed watching the many daily trains, especially those occasionally switching at local businesses. My Marx train set was well used. I had some extra track and a couple of manual turnouts and experimented with numerous track arrangements. At that point, the page or two of trains in the Montgomery Ward Christmas catalog was my main source of inspiration.

By age 10 or 11, my horizons expanded. I discovered *Model Railroader* magazine and the model railroad books of Fawcett Publications on the newsstand. I spent many hours studying these materials. I also found a hobby shop in the town where my grandparents lived. Several times per year I would harass the patient and friendly shop proprietor with my naive questions and admire the astonishing 4x6 HO layout in the window. I built my first freight cars (a Varney ore car and a couple of paper-sided Strombecker boxcars) and began to dream more knowledgeably about the possibilities.

In junior high, we moved to larger Iowa railroad town. Boone was both a division point on the C&NW and an important stop on the Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern interurban. (It is also now the home of the Boone & Scenic Valley Railroad — a tourist line operating on some of the old FDDM&S right-of-way.) I built a Mantua Booster and constructed my first layout: a 4x4 foot empire in the corner of our apartment's bedroom. We soon moved to a house with a basement, and I began constructing a 4x8 layout. Through high school, I continued to study model railroad magazines and putter in the hobby, but I didn't really make much progress on my layout. In addition to the regular distractions of high school years, I usually had a part-time job, and my interest in the competing hobby of building and flying model airplanes also peaked. I was fortunate for one year that my part-time job was at the local hobby shop. I was only 15, and the pay was minimal, but I benefited from the hobby mentoring of owner Harold "Red" Theis. And working there was fun.

I have always felt that hobby-related things I learned in those years (using a few tools, building benchwork, soldering and wiring, understanding electricity at least enough to comprehend cab control and pulse power, and generally working with my hands) have served me well as an adult. They have been very useful to me in the hobby and, more generally, as the family handyman. Acquisition of broadly useful skills may be one of the more underrated benefits of our hobby.

After a 15-year hiatus while in college, graduate school, and starting a family, I became more active again. I built a few kits, primarily structures, sketched many layout ideas, and actually started a couple of layouts with benchwork, tracklaying, and wiring. But my career kept me too busy for much railroading. I did join the NMRA and attended my first convention, the 1987 National in Eugene, Oregon. A little later, I began to more seriously build some structures and dioramas. In 1998, I entered my first National Contest (Kansas City) and won first place in the off-line display category. The unsophisticated craftsmanship of my winning oil storage depot is now a little embarrassing, but the success really hooked me. I have since participated in numerous contests and always enjoyed it.

My modeling activity accelerated in 2001. A young grandson provided justification for acquiring a Bachmann On30 train set at a swap meet. I was so impressed by the potential of this equipment that I switched my major interests from HO to On30. I have been totally satisfied with the change, but it took time to adapt to the amount of space required for ¼-inch scale buildings.

The final major inspiration for my current level of activity was, perhaps surprisingly, our purchase in 2005 of a vacation property on Washington's Olympic peninsula in the oceanside village of Moclips. I learned about Moclips' interesting railroad history through the excellent Museum of the North Beach located in Moclips. This now tiny village had been the western-most terminus of the Northern Pacific, home to a vibrant shingle mill industry, and an important tourist destination. I built a ¼-inch scale replica of the original Moclips station for the museum to assist in their efforts to solicit funds for rebuilding that station as a home for the museum. My Moclips & Beck's Creek is mostly fictional but certainly guided by that local railroad history. I am firmly a freelance modeler, but having a story grounded in the prototype situation has been extraordinarily valuable in stimulating and sustaining the momentum necessary to build a layout.

My interest in the Achievement Program (beyond entering structures in contests) began in 2007, spurred by a clinic on this topic by Jack Hamilton, our Regional program chair. Initial research, however, suggested that I could reasonably think about earning certificates in only five areas; achieving the required seven would not be likely. So, I didn't take any action. Then, in 2013, I received an email from Jack suggesting dates for possible team visits to conduct AP evaluations of my work; I have assumed this contact was based on my contest success at the recent Regional Convention. We arranged a visit and it resulted in my first three Certificates of Achievement; I also realized I was close on two more and heard strong encouragement to consider a couple of areas that I had not

really thought feasible. So, I modified my modeling goals and worked toward completing the requirements for the remaining certificates. Those four certificates followed from AP evaluations in conjunction with the 4D PNR spring meet in 2017. The initiative and assistance by Jack, with help from people like Di Voss and Ken Liesse, were critical to my success and more broadly to the success of the Achievement Program in the Pacific Northwest Region. The encouragement, interest, and fellowship of the perhaps 100 members of the loosely organized Northwest Narrow Gauge Group have also been invaluable.

Certificates Earned
Ron Hopkins

Master Builder - Motive Power
Master Builder - Cars
Master Builder - Structures
Master Builder - Scenery
Model Railroad Engineer - Civil
Model Railroad Engineer - Electrical
Association Volunteer